

# Ross warns Conservative party about the reckless First Minister

In a speech at the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester, Douglas Ross, leader of the Scottish Conservatives, insisted that Humza Yousaf's proxy referendum proposal for the next General Election is so "rash and irresponsible" even his divisive predecessor would have ruled it out.

Douglas Ross also told delegates at the Scottish fringe that the First Minister's ever-closer relationship with the "extreme" Greens was proof of the "danger" he posed to Scotland.

Scottish Conservative leader Douglas Ross said: "Humza Yousaf has described [the alliance with the Greens] as 'worth its weight in gold'.

"So much so that he suspended a member of his own party, an SNP MSP, to defend his Green allies.

"No party standing up for the majority of Scots would put Patrick Harvie and Lorna Slater into government. Yet the SNP are so obsessed with independence that they are willing to ignore all of their extreme policies and failures in office.

"That's why Humza Yousaf is a danger to Scotland.

"We call him useless – but actually he's reckless. He's certainly more reckless than Nicola Sturgeon.

"On independence, he is more rash, irresponsible and hasty than even Nicola Sturgeon at her worst.

"He has said it himself – in next year's General Election –

even if he loses a bunch of his MPs but manages to squeak a majority by a single seat, no matter his share of the vote, he will declare independence.

“Even Nicola Sturgeon would have dismissed that plan as too far.”

## **Mr Ross's speech 1 October 2023**

Thank you, Meghan.

And thanks to all of you who have joined us to kick off this year's Conservative Conference.

I am sure many of you came here expecting lots of SNP jokes, given the year they have had.

About the luxury motorhome now languishing in a police station.

Talk about poor Humza Yousaf losing out on the perks of the job.

But maybe it's for the best he doesn't have the keys to the campervan – his insurance is probably out of date.

This is a man who couldn't even steer a scooter without falling over.

I certainly wouldn't trust him with more power.

I don't think anybody does – except the Murrells.

But I'm sure you'll hear more of that when our outstanding Scottish Secretary takes to the stage in the main hall later this afternoon.

In this session, I want to talk about the real impact that 16 years of SNP Government has had on Scotland and so many families up and down the country.

From the men and women struggling with drug addiction and alcoholism on the streets of Glasgow and Dundee – unable to get the treatment they need because the SNP cut funding for recovery services for years.

To the island businesses on the brink of closure because of the SNP's failure to deliver a reliable ferry service.

In every part of Scotland there are people who have been forgotten by this SNP Government over 16 long years.

Forgotten as the SNP have focused on the wrong priorities for Scotland.

Forgotten through incompetence and negligence.

Forgotten in the SNP's obsession with independence.

Humza Yousaf only thinks of his own backyard. He doesn't do anything for the rest of Scotland

The further away you live from Holyrood, the less the SNP focus on what really matters to you.

If you don't live next to the M8, they ignore your concerns.

They don't pay much attention to anyone who lives outside of the biggest cities.

I know from my own constituency of Moray just how distant Holyrood can feel.

How little the SNP Government seems to care or understand about the everyday lives of people who call our corner of Scotland home.

Yet that feeling of being abandoned and forgotten extends far beyond our region, it covers people of all walks of life in every part of Scotland.

From rural and island communities struggling with the impact

of poor infrastructure and broken promises to improve it.

To towns and cities blighted by a dying high street that do not get the investment they deserve.

To taxpayers who pay more, but their children receive a worse education, and their parents wait longer for hospital treatment.

To victims who are let down by a justice system that isn't on their side.

To North Sea workers, who see their livelihoods put at risk by extreme green policies.

To everyone who doesn't agree with independence and wants to see Scotland remain part of the UK.

Together, these groups and so many more represent the Scotland that the SNP has forgotten about.

The people that Humza Yousaf's government is not interested in trying to reach out to.

Who they do not govern for.

The silent majorities who are scunnered, who have been let down time and time again in favour of the interests of vocal minorities.

This is the SNP's Forgotten Scotland, all the people who the nationalists have written off.

Whose votes helped them into government and onto a majority, but who the SNP are no longer listening to.

The people that Nicola Sturgeon gave up on and Humza Yousaf hasn't even tried to win back.

Who were abandoned when the SNP failed to be a national party for all of Scotland and instead became a nationalist party

only interested in appealing to its own supporters.

Some of those people support other parties: the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats.

But others are politically homeless, they do not feel that any party speaks for them.

They may together be the SNP's Forgotten Scotland, but they also do not feel that the other parties are doing enough to address the problems faced in their everyday lives.

And that is the challenge put to the opposition.

Because if the SNP are ever to be removed from power, then parties like ours must speak for and win their support.

Even with all of the difficulties that the SNP has faced, they still threaten to win a majority of Scottish seats next year.

Which Humza Yousaf has said will be treated as a mandate for independence.

And to retain government with their Green partners in 2026.

If we want to deliver a different outcome, then we need to focus on the issues that matter to Forgotten Scotland, not the same old arguments that have defined our politics for far too long.

And that is the mission that I am setting for the Scottish Conservatives.

We will stand up for everyone in our cities, towns, villages and rural communities that the SNP have forgotten.

Under my leadership we will seek to win the trust and support of the SNP's Forgotten Scotland.

We will fight for their interests and propose solutions and policies to address the real challenges they face every day.

And we will endeavour to be the national party that the nationalists can't be.

One of the most significant issues that divides our country, that creates a Forgotten Scotland, is infrastructure.

If you live outside of the Central Belt, if you live far away from the M8, then the roads that you travel on will be worse.

Rail services will be infrequent

And broadband speeds will be slower.

And that is before we even get onto the unreliable ferry services to Scotland's islands.

Not only does poor infrastructure hold so many parts of our country back.

But it also further entrenches the feeling that they have been left behind.

A feeling that is strengthened by the fact that the SNP Government have gone back on so many of their promises. Let's look at roads.

Upgrades to the A9 promised since 2007 have still not even got a completion date.

Last year deaths on that road reached the highest level in over a decade.

And deaths on the sections still to be upgraded were three times higher than on the already dualled parts of the road.

There is no way that a similar situation would be tolerated on the M8.

Yet because it concerns the north of the country it is repeatedly moved down the priority list.

Campaigners now believe that those upgrades will not be completed until 2050.

This situation is a total disgrace and shows how little the SNP care about Highland communities,

Yet it is not the only road where essential upgrades have been delayed.

The A96

The A83

The A75

The A77

The A68

The A1

All of these roads have been left without a firm date on when they will be upgraded.

The SNP would rather bring the anti-driver Greens into government than protect lives on dangerous roads.

In Scotland, your ability to drive about the country safely is now considered a political choice for government.

The SNP have even called for a 20% reduction in car journeys.

This fundamentally misunderstands rural and town life.

Where driving is not a choice; it is a necessity.

So many people need to use their car, either because public transport is not available or too expensive.

While we understand the importance of achieving Net Zero, this cannot be done at the expense of ordinary families.

We will always be open about which green policies are sensible and which are extreme.

But the SNP have not been honest with people about the costs of their radical plans.

They are trying to dupe the public.

Humza Yousaf is misleading people about how much his targets will cost working people.

The SNP are acting two-faced, pretending that we can reach net zero at record pace with zero effort.

It's a sleekit and deceitful approach to hide how damaging their policies will be for families.

Like their push to tax and penalise people out of their cars.

The Scottish Conservatives will always back drivers.

That's why, unlike the independence-obsessed SNP, the very first pledge in our 2024 General Election Manifesto will be to fully dual the A9 to Inverness, and the A96, as soon as possible.

Where the SNP have failed to deliver on its promises to the North of Scotland, our Scottish Conservative promise will be cast iron – no ifs, no buts.

We will make dualling the A9 and A96 and upgrading other major roads our top infrastructure priority.

Yet our roads are not the only way that the SNP have let down large parts of our country through failing to deliver necessary infrastructure.

The R100 programme, Scotland's superfast digital rollout was supposed to be completed in 2021 but will now not be finished until 2028.



And once again it is the north of the country that are the last to be finished.

The Ferguson ferries – great rusting symbols of how the SNP have dragged Scotland's reputation for shipbuilding excellence through the mud – will be up to seven years late.

And, so far, almost four times over budget.

I could mention more.

Taken together delays to SNP infrastructure projects come to a total of 90 years and counting.

90 years – that's a lifetime of delays.

If we want to bring our country together, to address the issues of Forgotten Scotland, then we need to see investment from the SNP to deliver on those promises on time.

And that starts by putting our left-behind regions first.

In Scotland's least affluent area wages are almost 40% lower than those in our most affluent area.

If we continue to invest in the same parts of our country first, then this will never change.

That is why in the rollout of new national infrastructure, we will adopt an 'outwards-in' approach

This will see projects delivered in the North and the Borders first, ahead of being brought to the populated centre of our country.

Meaning more government funding being used to support hard-to-reach areas for the rollout of national programmes, such as 5G capable broadband.

This will help to level the playing field and open up all of Scotland to new opportunities.

Yet to create new opportunities we need to make every part of our country an attractive place to live.

The collapse of civic pride has also created a Forgotten Scotland in our town centres and high streets.

That's why I'm so pleased that the first major announcement of this Conservative Conference will see £140 million pounds of investment in towns across Scotland.

Dumfries, Clydebank, Coatbridge, Irvine, Greenock, Kilmarnock and Elgin will each receive £20million from the UK government over the next ten years to deliver for local people and businesses and maximise the opportunities for these towns.

Crime and economic hardship have also hit communities large and small across Scotland from Union Street and Sauchiehall Street to the high streets of Kelso and Maybole

Last month we published our plan "Grasping the Thistle" to reintroduce growth back into Scotland's economic strategy.

And the proposals in that paper provide a programme for revitalising local economies.

Yet it is also the case that crime and anti-social behaviour undermine the attractiveness of communities.

People feel less safe, but the SNP Government prioritises criminals over victims and the police.

As Justice Secretary, Humza Yousaf spent millions of pounds on phones for prisoners, some of which were used to organise firebomb attacks and drug deals.

While in the North East of Scotland, the SNP have forced the police to give up on investigating many crimes, as a result of budget cuts.

The SNP have literally chosen to fund the facilitation of

criminal activity over tackling crime.

The Scottish Conservatives want to deliver a justice system that is on the side of victims and properly punishes those who commit crimes.

That is why we have set out our plans for a proper Victims Law to strengthen the rights of victims and would increase sentencing limits.

Yet we also need to back the people who tackle crime in the first place.

As the husband of a serving officer, I see the pressures that our police face day in day out.

It is a demanding job.

But the SNP have made those pressures worse by cutting over 700 police officers from our streets since Police Scotland was created.

And we have seen the closure of 140 local police stations.

Having police on the beat in local communities is essential for helping people to feel safe.

That is why the Scottish Conservatives would introduce a Local Policing Act.

This would guarantee more community involvement in policing decisions and ensure police spend more time on the beat.

But we need more officers to deliver on this objective.

And that is why we will also recruit at least an additional 1,000 police officers, to more than make up for the shortfall that Humza Yousaf has presided over.

Our pledge to protect and grow the size of our force will ensure that we can properly tackle the crimes that blight our

communities.

And by rebuilding local economies and making our streets safer, we will restore civic pride to Forgotten Scotland.

Being on the side of criminals over the police is just one reason why so many people feel that this SNP Government does not share their values.

They see a government that is taking forward dangerous legislation to undermine women's safety through the Gender Reform Bill.

Attacking free speech through Humza Yousaf's Hate Crime Act.

Or raising income and council tax during a cost-of-living crisis, making ordinary families pay for the nationalists' incompetence.

And conclude that the SNP have the wrong values and are more interested in representing vocal minorities than standing up for mainstream opinions.

This problem has become even more pronounced as the extreme Greens gain more and more influence over the government.

An alliance that Humza Yousaf has described as "worth its weight in gold".

So much so that he suspended a member of his own party, an SNP MSP, to defend his Green allies.

No party standing up for the majority of Scots would put Patrick Harvie and Lorna Slater into government.

Yet the SNP are so obsessed with independence that they are willing to ignore all of their extreme policies and failures in office.

That's why Humza Yousaf is a danger to Scotland.

He has learned from the empty bluster of Salmond and the false faces of Sturgeon.

We call him useless – but actually he's reckless.

He's certainly more reckless than Nicola Sturgeon.

On independence, he is more rash, irresponsible and hasty than even Nicola Sturgeon was at her worst.

He is prepared to push harder and more aggressively than she did for independence.

He has said it himself – in next year's General Election – even if he loses a bunch of his MPs but manages to squeak a majority by a single seat, no matter his share of the vote, he will declare independence.

Even Nicola Sturgeon would have dismissed that plan as too far.

Nicola Sturgeon was cautious, but Humza is reckless.

He has the arrogance to try and split up Scotland. With a smarmy grin and misplaced bravado, he'll think he can do it.

This is a man who thinks he did a good job as the health secretary who let waiting times spiral,

the justice secretary who stretched the police to breaking point

And the transport minister who wasted a fortune on ferries.

But the only thing he's really capable of, is damage. He could drive Scotland to disaster if we're not careful.

Humza Yousaf has rebranded the SNP as a bigger version of the extremist Greens.

This 'new SNP' is a worse rebrand than Twitter becoming X.

But just like Elon Musk's changes, it has seen the SNP become a nastier, more bitter and divisive force.

On independence, this new SNP are willing to go further, act more erratically, do more damage.

Unless we stop him by defeating the SNP in seats across Scotland, who knows how dangerous Humza Yousaf could be for Scotland's future?

In their desperate drive to create a majority for independence in the Scottish Parliament, the SNP have pushed a majority of the public away.

As we look ahead to next year's General Election, we need to send a strong signal to the SNP Government to abandon their independence obsession.

Abandon their alliance with the extreme Greens.

And to focus on the real priorities of Forgotten Scotland.

There are millions of people right across our country who feel abandoned by this SNP Government.

Who feel that they have been pushed down the priority list and that key promises have been broken.

Who feel their communities are not receiving the investment and opportunities they deserve.

And who feel detached from the values that the SNP Government say are representative of modern Scotland.

But many of these people feel that the opposition parties do not speak for them either, that they are just as much a part of the Holyrood bubble as the government.

This Forgotten Scotland are the essential group that will define elections to come.

And I am determined that the Scottish Conservatives will become the party that speaks for them.

We will be the champion of everyone who feels forgotten by the SNP.

From Giffnock to Galashiels, Perthshire to Peterhead, Stranraer to Selkirk.

We will stand up for the issues that matter to them and bring forward policies to focus on their real priorities.

We will represent their values and give a voice to the silent majority.

And together ensure that the SNP pays the price for ignoring those Scots in next year's General Election and in the Holyrood election in 2026.

Thank you.



Scottish Conservative leader Douglas Ross on a walkabout in Davidson's Mains with local candidate James Hill ahead of the 2022 local government election All parties will be getting



ready for the UK General Election which is probably going to take place in 2024. PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter